METROPOLIS IMPROVEMENTS BILL.

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

FEB. 12.—The Earl of Lincoln moved the third reading of this bill.—Mr. Hume objected to that part of the bill by which the Bank of England were authorized to advance money on the security of the new houses to be built as part of the projected improvements in the metropolis. The practice of such advances by the Bank of England was contrary to every sound principle of banking; and, if carried out to a great extent, might not leave a single sovereign in the bank, as was the case once. He would ask the right hon. gentleman the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether his attention had been called to this clause?—The Chancellor of the Exchequer said, that there was nothing in the present bill which had not been contained in a bill brought in two years ago. Since that bill had been passed into a law, a doubt arose as to the legal construction of one clause, viz., whether the bank would be bound to take, in repayment of the money advanced, instalments, as the money should be raised from the rents of the houses to be built. Legal opinions were taken on the point, and they were considered satisfactory; but he thought, under all the circumstances, that it would be the better course to come to Parliament, and thus at once to remove every doubt or difficulty in the matter. The whole of the money which the Commissioners of Woods and Forests were authorized to borrow from the bank would be repaid in five years. He did not see that the bank ran any risk whatever in the transaction.—After a few words from the Earl of Lincoln, which did not reach the gallery, Mr. Hume said, that very great complaints had been made of the delays which took place between the removal of houses and the erection of others in their place. In some cases two years were allowed to elapse from the removal of one set of houses to the erection of others. Would the noble lord the chief commissioner say to what cause those delays were to be attributed?—The Earl of Lincoln assured the hon. member and the House that every reasonable diligence was used in carrying out the contemplated improvements. It was necessary that houses should be removed gradually, for if all the houses which were intended to be removed were to be taken down and sold at once, their materials would scarcely fetch any thing.—The bill was then read a third time; and, after a short discussion relative to the advance of money by the Bank of England for the erection of public buildings, the bill was passed.

THE GRESHAM CLUB HOUSE.—The foundation-stone of the new building for the Gresham Club was laid on Thursday, the 8th inst., by the Lord Mayor. His lordship was attended by the sheriffs, a committee of the members of the club, and a number of influential citizens. The Lord Mayor, having been received by the committee, Mr. Flower, the architect, submitted to his lordship the plans of the building. The vice-chairman of the club (Mr. R. P. Davis) presented to the Lord Mayor the various coins to be deposited, and the secretary (Mr. Beat) read the scroll on which the objects of the club were inscribed. The coins and scroll were then placed in a leaden box, and deposited in the aperture prepared for them in the foundation-stone. The silver trowel was now handed to the Lord Mayor, by the chairman of the committee of the club (Mr. Lamie Murray), and the stone having been properly placed by the builder, Mr. Cubitt, his lordship spread the mortar upon it, and declared the foundation-stone to have been laid. Mr. L. Murray said he had now to thank his lordship on the part of the members of the club for his condescension in having on the present occasion laid the foundation of an institution which, he trusted, would be found to take its rank amongst the many which ornamented their noble city, founded, as they had all been, by the perseverance and enterprise of the citizens, amongst the foremost of whom stood Sir Thomas Gresham, whose name the club had honoured itself by taking. The ground on which the building (in the Italian style) is about to be erected adjoins the banking house of Messrs. Smith, Payne, and Smiths.

DESCRIPTION OF A NORMAN CASTLE OR PORTRESS.

IT consisted, with very few exceptions, of an inclosure of from five to ten acres of land; and was encircled by a river or artificial canal, called a moat, on the scarp or edge of which was a strong wall, succeeded by another, and between these was the first ballium, or outer court of the castle. Within the second wall, or that which immediately surrounded the keep or great tower, were storehouses for the garrison, and other offices suitable to the extent and distinction of the fortress. In the centre of this interior space or inclosure, was the citadel, or master-tower, as it is more properly called, in which resided the suzerain, or feudal chief, but occasionally it was occupied by the deputy, or castellan, who, for the time being, was the representative of the baron, and had the full exercise of his delegated authority. This master-tower was generally built upon an artificial mound. It contained the state apartments, which were in proportion to the style and retinue of the founder, with all the other domestic offices belonging to the strongholds of that period. In the centre of the tower, and descending to the lowest part of the foundation, were the dungeons, in which were confined the prisoners of war, the felons or malefactors of his juriudiction. In several instances, access to the various compartments of the castle was provided by secret inlets through the centre of the walls, and by subterraneous passages made under the fosse.

In advance of the ditch or moat was the barbican, or outer defence, with a watch-tower that communicated with the interior by means of a drawbridge across the moat, which opened inwards, so as to be under the control of the sentinel on guard. The entrance to the ballium, or outer court, was secured by gates, with a ponderous grating or portcullis, which was raised or lowered by means of those iron chains and pulleys which are still used in some of our military fortresses, and are always met with in the fortified cities of the Netherlands. The walls were further protected by towers and battlements, from which, as well as through the numerous loopholes by which they were perforated, arrows and other missiles could be discharged with deadly effect; while through the apertures of the machicolation above—

> "Sudden on the assailants' head,
> Blocks of stone and molten lead,
> Or worse than all descending, gushing,
> Scorching as they fell, or crushing,
> Helmed warriors in their fall,
> Guarded each embattled wall."

The outer walls were generally from six to ten feet thick; those of Rochester Castle are seven; while the walls of the keep to which all look for retreat under desperate circumstances, were often fifteen feet in thickness, and contained in their centre many secret closets, passages, and recesses, to which none but the castellan and his family had access. In the castle of Hammis there is a secret chamber, the key of which is transmitted from father to son, and never known to more than the "*seigneur actuel*," and some trustworthy official. Before the invention of artillery, one of these strongholds, such as we have described, might have been considered impregnable; and when taken, the surrender was generally in consequence of famine, revolt, or cowardice on the part of the garrison, or of stratagem on that of the besiegers.

Nearly all the fortresses of this class were erected during that period that elapsed between the reign of the Conqueror and that of Edward the Third. The Castle of Rochester appears to have been erected soon after the decisive battle of Hastings; and in tracing its history and that of its founder, we shall adhere to the general opinion, so far as that may be found to harmonize with historical documents. Castles built on the Norman model varied according to the natural shape of the ground selected for their erection. The military baron, following the example of the Roman general, selected that position to which nature had given the best means of security, which provided against sudden approach or surprise, and in cases of extremity offered some facility for escape, of which various instances are recorded in history. The sites chosen were generally on capes or promontories overlooking the sea; on high banks protected by a river, or on isolated hills, where connecting valleys, by forming a natural fosse, would interpose a chasm between the besiegers and the besieged. These natural positions were readily taken advantage of by the warlike baron; while the difficulty of access could be increased by artificial means, such as damming up a stream which flows through the ravine, and thus forming a temporary lake. The situation of Rochester Castle is partly an example of this kind; the high ground on which it stands, and its immediate access to the river, were natural recommendations not to be lost sight of, and which the founder took every opportunity of turning to the best account. In castle-building, the general maxim was—

> "Where the land o'erlooks the flood,
> Steep with rocks and fringed with wood;
> Where, throughout the circling year,
> Wells the fountain fresh and clear;
> Scoop the dungeon, rear the wall,
> Pile on high the feudal hall."

—*The Castles and Abbeys of England.*

THE "NELSON MONUMENTS" OF ENGLAND.

AMONG the innumerable Nelson statues to be found in English towns, Birmingham possesses on its Bull-ring the smallest. This is a statue of the great man, representing him only the size of life. It is a perfectly faithful copy of nature, expressing thoroughly the simple, unassuming appearance of this citizen hero. His lean cheeks are represented just as they were in the man; his lank hair falls over his forehead, and he wears the empty sleeve of his shot-off arm. To my mind, the whole was too faithful to nature, although it comes from the hand of Westmacott, one of England's most distinguished living sculptors. Much, too, might be said against the empty sleeve. On right and true principles of art, ought not the arm to have been restored? Were a great man, an admiral or a general, to have both legs shot off in battle, should we put up the mutilated trunk—a statue without legs—in the market-place? Can we not imagine ourselves as meeting great men in a future state, whole and perfect? And is not this art of sculpture in white marble a sort of transfiguration of the human form, as it has preceded us to Paradise? Should we not represent our great men, in order to make this transfiguration more noble, hovering as it were over us, transfigured to the highest ideal glory, rather than cling to the historical, and therefore earthly relics of their sorrowful every-day history, and to their bodies battered by the storms of life? For the rest, this little, sorrowful-looking statue of Nelson, literally the only statue which Birmingham possesses, stands almost lost in the midst of 200,000 inhabitants. Only imagine, one single sculpture to 200,000 living men! In Rome, or Athens, there would have been one to every 100, or even 50 men. Even in Berlin, Petersburgh, and other comparatively modern towns, we might reckon a statue to every 4,000 or 5,000 inhabitants; but in Birmingham, as I have said, there is one to 200,000! It is a question whether, in the whole world, there could be found another town of the same population so monumentless; at any rate, thus much is certain, that even among the manufacturing towns of England it has in this respect no equal. Not only Liverpool, Manchester, and Glasgow, but Newcastle, Bristol, and Hull have more, not to speak of such fine cities as Dublin and Edinburgh. Birmingham and Leeds are, I verily believe, the most pleasureless, tasteless, and ornamentless towns in England. On the whole, if Birmingham, in reference to the useful arts, may be called a Paradise, it is, in reference to the fine arts, a complete wilderness. In the theatre here I learnt that I could get tired even of a play of Shakspeare.—*Knol's Travels through England and Wales.*

REMARKABLE CHANGE IN PROPERTY.—When Lawrence Sheriff, grocer and citizen of London, left the third part of a field of 24 acres, in the parish of Holborn, for the endowment of a grammar-school at Rugby, it produced no more than 8*l.* a year. This field was called Conduit-close, and was nearly half a mile from any house. It is now covered with buildings, and the rental exceeds 10,000*l.* a year. The field has risen in value from 8*l.* to 10,000*l.* and upwards.